

Time has not helped finish health center

■ *Real-life 'Patch Adams' doctor still short on funding for hospital, leading to questions on money use*

Associated Press

HILLSBORO, W.Va. — The hit Robin Williams movie *Patch Adams* ends on a feel-good note, with the audience told that construction of a free hospital is under way in West Virginia.

That's Hollywood. In the mountains of West Virginia, the project exists mostly in the imagination. There is no hospital, just a hodgepodge of buildings, some half-finished.

Dr. Hunter D. "Patch" Adams has been raising money for his cause since the early '70s — more than \$1.1 million, by his own account. He wants tens of millions more to complete the project, but some are questioning where the money is going — and whether the movie dream will ever be reality.

The Gesundheit! Institute, a health-care reform movement founded by Dr. Adams more than 20 years ago, sits on 310 acres he bought on Droop Mountain. There is a 6,500-square-foot workshop, a half-built Russian-style dacha, a two-hole outhouse and a cottage with attached greenhouse.

The cottage has a fax machine, a computer and three phone lines. The walls are unfinished planks. Heat comes from a wood-fired stove.

There are no patients, just two staffers who answer an endless stream of calls and letters from people suddenly enchanted with the concept of free health care from seeing *Patch Adams*, which stars Mr. Williams as a maverick medical student who espouses the healing power of humor and compassion.

Dr. Adams insists that \$25 million from now, a hospital will stand.

"It's like the end of most Frank Capra movies: We're going to get the girl, get the business and ride into the sunset," he says from his home in Arlington, Va.

Others do not share his conviction.



Hunter "Patch" Adams leads a workshop promoting pers taken in Morgantown, W.Va. The film *Patch Adams* stars

Susan Cafoncelli, a Charleston nurse, grew disen-
chanted with Dr. Adams after a 1997 visit.

"He is a great storyteller. He uses it to manipu-
late people," she says. "People are in tears after
seeing this movie and they want to give him money,
and that's exactly what he wants."

Dr. Adams dreams of a 40-bed, full-service hospi-
tal where people are emotionally, physically and
spiritually healed through friendship, humor and ho-
listic techniques.

Gesundheit! staff member Jon Luchs, who has
lived in Hillsboro for six months, remains a believ-
er.

"There's a tendency to become unhappy when
the ideal isn't realized or it becomes apparent it's
going to take work," he says. "Dissenters are often
loud, even if there are only a few of them."

Jef Harris, an herb-store owner who lives near
Hillsboro, is among the dissenters. He has never
met Dr. Adams but says financial concerns kept him

cars about Williams as a misfit medical student.

from joining Gesundheit!

"Where's this money going? The staff could not answer that question," Mr. Harris says. "He's taken people's money for years and done nothing."

Dr. Adams dismisses Mr. Harris as someone who couldn't establish a business relationship with Gesundheit!

"We are unbelievably wholesome. We are wacky. And not everyone who has come to us has loved us. But 750,000 people love us," he says of his supporters.

In his 1993 book, *Gesundheit!*, Dr. Adams said he needed \$5 million for construction and \$1.5 million a year for operating costs. Today he wants \$50 million – half for construction and half for operating expenses.

"The fund-raising goal has changed as the plan for the hospital has evolved," Dr. Adams explains. "The first plan was infantile."

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